



.....STRAIGHT FROM THE HORSES MOUTH

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July 2, 2015 Edition

As I write this, it is a couple of days before of the Fourth of July and I am going to take the liberty to start this week's edition with what I think is the most powerful paragraph from the very document that we celebrate each year on the Fourth of July: "When in the Course of human events, it becomes necessary for one people to dissolve the political bands which have connected them with another, and to assume among the powers of the earth, the separate and equal station to which the Laws of Nature and of Nature's God entitle them, a decent respect to the opinions of mankind requires that they should declare the causes which impel them to the separation. We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness.--That to secure these rights, Governments are instituted among Men, deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed, --That whenever any Form of Government becomes destructive of these ends, it is the Right of the People to alter or to abolish it, and to institute new Government, laying its foundation on such principles and organizing its powers in such form, as to them shall seem most likely to effect their Safety and Happiness."

I wonder how many people even recognize those words or have either recited them or read them? I have to tell you that the Fourth of July has always been one of my favorite holidays, not necessarily because of the activities that go with it, but because of its meaning. I know that patriotic themes will blare from marching bands or PA systems, flags will furl in home and main streets, fireworks will thunder the skies displaying incredible bursts of color and sound, and grills will fill backyards' air with the sweet smell of cheeseburgers and hot dogs. It is hard not to get caught up in the proceedings, relax and sit back without thinking of much but what is around you. Unfortunately, what is perhaps lost with many people with the barbeques, parades, family gatherings, ball games, music, fireworks etc. is the true meaning of this day.

The Fourth of July is rightfully known as Independence Day, the day the United States of America declared its independence from the British Empire. Lest we forget, there were twenty-four lawyers and jurists, eleven merchants and, of special interest to me, nine farmers who met to forge the very document that started America's quest for freedom and liberty. All were men of means, well educated. But they signed the Declaration of Independence knowing full well that the penalty could be death if they were captured. They each saw the tyranny of government and did something about it.

We all too often take for granted that declaration assuming America's victory in its war for independence was inevitable and the freedoms we enjoy as a result of that victory a certainty. Actually, five years would pass between the signing of the Declaration of Independence in Philadelphia and the surrender of Lord Cornwallis to George Washington. Those five years were hard ones with many reversals of fortune for the cause of American independence. At several junctures it seemed the American patriots were fighting a lost cause. Even after Cornwallis surrendered in 1781, parts of America would remain under British occupation until 1783 and harassment continued for several years after that.

It would be a long time indeed before American independence would be fully secured. Since that time America has transformed itself from a small nation constantly menaced by the imperial powers of Europe to a superpower that would repeatedly rescue and defend that continent, and the rest of the world, from the forces of tyranny. That was all still in the future in 1776 - the year we celebrate on the Fourth, and by no means a sure thing. The transformation of America from a collection of rebellious colonies to a global champion of freedom that is the envy of the world could have been aborted at any time, especially in the beginning. It did not happen without the courage and sacrifice of the men and women of the Founding Generation who risked everything to gain for themselves and succeeding generations the blessings of freedom. They had no guarantee of success in 1776 and in the years that followed it seemed they were doomed to failure but they did not give up, they would have liberty and, if not, they preferred to die. That determination to live free or die is why our forefathers prevailed in its struggle for independence and why America is the land of the free and the home of the brave.

If you think of it, Independence Day gives us 24 hours to reconnect with those "self-evident truths" that emboldens that paragraph I started this column with. But it is these same truths that we increasingly take for granted. In the words of Patrick Henry, one of the Founding Fathers: we are "responsible for the greatest trust ever confided to a political society." If we, the beneficiaries of that great sacrifice, are to retain the independence and the freedoms we enjoy today, then we must, first, be eternally vigilant in the protection of our liberties and, second, be as willing as our ancestors to give our all in the defense of government of the people, by the people and for the people. We must not lose sight of the past or future or be complacent!

Food, fireworks, music and other fun activities associated with the Fourth of July are wonderful and I sincerely wish everyone an enjoyable time. Yet we must always be mindful that freedom, especially our freedom as Americans, is not a gift, but must be earned and jealously guarded generation after generation. In light of everything that has transpired over the last few weeks, please do not lose sight of what has made America great. So on this Fourth of July and all others in the future, amidst all the celebrations, I hope we all stop to remember the sacrifices that made this day possible and commit our lives, our efforts and our sacred honor to upholding the legacy of freedom bequeathed us on that first Independence Day. I hope we all remember the true meaning of Independence Day as we have the freedom to do as we choose – so far!

The preceding information comes from the research and personal observations of the writer which may or may not reflect the views of UNL or Nebraska Extension. For more further information on these or other topics contact D. A. Lienemann, Nebraska Extension Educator for Webster County in Red Cloud, (402) 746-3417 or email to: dlienemann2@unl.edu or go to the website at: <http://www.webster.unl.edu/home>